

Participatory Research with Students in Higher Education: Transcript



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Akua Quao: Hello and welcome to this module, using participatory research with students in higher education. My name is Akua Quao and I'm based at the University of Lancashire. I'm also a member of the National Centre for Research Methods Participatory & Collaborative Methods Special Interest Group. And it's a pleasure to share this subject with you. Interest in students as participants is nothing new, but this movement in participatory research methods is increasing as more interest and understanding in the student experience and with help from Nottingham University has grown significantly. Participatory methods are widely acknowledged as a valuable tool to inform research and bring about change within higher education. So, the student population has changed. If we compare it to a couple of decades ago, we now have a much wider range of students in higher education who are learning in different ways. So, we have students online, we have students on campus, we have students who do a bit of both. It's really varied. We have students out in the workplace. Nonetheless, they are people that we can actively engage in research.

So, increasingly more students are combining work, family and other responsibilities with their students, and this adds not only to their stress levels but can impact significantly their availability to participate in research that requires more than a questionnaire. Studying the student population is not only important, but interesting as the data can significantly contribute to improving the provisional services and the overall student experience. So, our understanding of working with this population group is really important.

So, the purpose of this particular... this module is to provide an introduction into the different factors which could impact participatory research with students in higher education. We're also going to review the importance of building

partnership to facilitate participation and highlight some challenges and how to overcome these when working with the student population.

It's important that we stay anchored to the core principles. And whilst it may seem obvious, but making a partnership or participation work is not that straightforward. And this is why understanding the student population and having flexibility is key. So, when we say partnership, it's where the participant is seen and treated as an equal partner in the research. Now, there can be power dynamics between the researcher and the participant, but here we're talking about equal partnership. Being prepared to build a partnership is fundamental. We've got to remember that for some students this is the first time that they are living independently and grappling with the practicalities of self and time management, as well as beginning to build new relationships with people from very different backgrounds. Many may be unfamiliar with participatory methods, so we'll need some level of awareness raising or education around what participatory methods are and what's involved for them, what it involves in your expectations and what they can expect from you as well as a researcher. This is an important link which will facilitate active engagement, which is what you want within participatory methods.

Participation. So, when we say participation, whichever method you choose, active participation is crucial. This is where your relationship-building skills to gain interest, to gain trust and to facilitate confidence in participation is part of the groundwork that cannot be overlooked.

Now, I think it goes without saying that whenever you have any project, there's bound to be some challenges along the way, and I think there are some hidden challenges here, but nonetheless, there are ways around this we can adopt in order to facilitate success, one of these being poor recruitment. So, in addressing poor recruitment, carefully review the academic calendars within the different institutions you will be working. And when I say that, what I mean is that we have various intakes, so we have the September intake, so September students all the way that go through till June/July, then you can have... sometimes we have the January intake again, and then we have May or there are July intakes. So, have

a look at the variants in the calendars that will enable you to be able to recruit participants from the different cohorts. And this will help in terms of bumping up the numbers as well and getting the more appropriate students to participate. Also, over-recruit. So, no matter what your target number is, over-recruit, bearing in mind that there will be the participant that will not attend for various reasons, and there are those that will not attend despite confirmation that they're able to attend. So, it'll be good practice to plan to have two or three reminders where you are prompting reminding people of the upcoming meetings or events or tasks that need to be completed.

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Another issue to consider is participants who are not fully engaged, and sometimes you'll find that there are some participants who will dominate the same... participants will dominate the activities or what needs to be done. So, a way round this is to stay connected with the participants. When I say stay connected, build the relationship through briefings. You can have short briefings online, it could be through a bulletin, but stay connected in between what needs to be done.

Then there's the issue of incomplete tasks, so you may find that participants have not completed what you've asked them to do, and a way round this is to provide very clear guidance, guidance sheets, or they could be recordings of how to actually complete the task at hand.

Finally, this is about you looking after yourself. You are likely, as a researcher, to be analysing data that is emotionally demanding. So, it's very important that you have in place ways that you can look after your own wellbeing.

Finally, just to say enjoy the process. It is an enjoyable process, but make sure you enjoy it. Thank you for taking the time to listen.

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